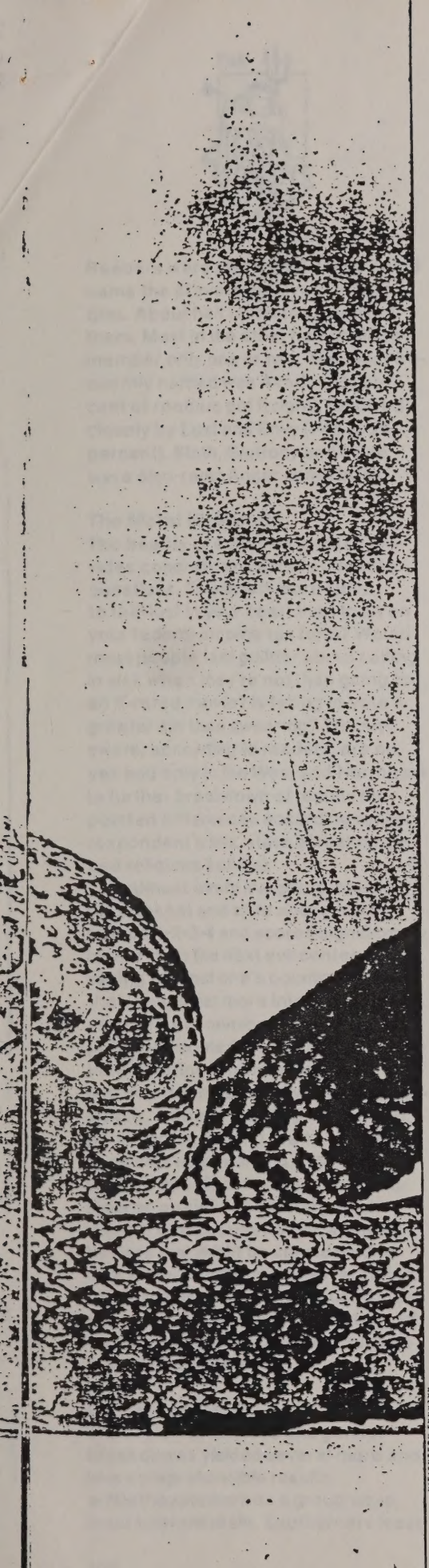


SIN

From murder to laziness and cutting in line, a darn-close-to-scientific poll ranks the wrongs that flesh is heir to

This week Joan Collins will be the tour guide through *Sins*, a lavish seven-hour CBS miniseries featuring murder, gang rape, greed, adultery, jealousy and frequent costume changes. That the production cost $14 million suggests the obvious—sin sells in prime time. And that, in turn, raises a timely question: If people enjoy watching fictional misbehavior, how do they feel about it in real life?

To find out, PEOPLE included in our Jan. 13 issue a lengthy questionnaire aimed at defining just what, in the '80s, Americans regard as sinful. Readers were asked to estimate how guilty they would feel, on a scale from 1 (blameless) to 10 (guilty to the max), if they engaged in any of 51 activities ranging from murder and spying to embezzlement and nude sunbathing. Responses were combined to give each activity an average score—hypocrisy, for example, earned a 6.19, which made it just a little more sinful than atheism at 6.12 (theologians can sign off here).

One thousand responses were selected at random for analysis. Four out of five of these respondents were women. Eighty percent said they believed in God, although only 43 percent said they attended church at least once a month. Half of the respondents were married and 79 percent were employed. Fifty-four percent said they were Protestant, 30 percent Catholic and 5 percent Jewish.

The Top 10

For starters, we asked readers to rank the Ten Commandments by degree of difficulty. Not surprisingly, most people felt that it was easier to avoid committing murder than to keep their eyes off their neighbor's spouse. The results were:

1 (Hardest to keep) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
2 Remember the Sabbath day.
3 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, [nor] thy neighbor's wife . . . nor anything that is thy neighbor's.
4 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
5 Thou shalt not commit adultery.
6 Thou shalt not steal.
7 Honor thy father and thy mother.
8 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
9 Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.
10 (Easiest to keep) Thou shalt not kill.

CONTINUED

Readers were also asked if they could name the proverbial Seven Deadly Sins. About half failed to cite any of them. Most in the other half could remember only one or two. The most frequently named was Avarice (36 percent of readers got it right), followed closely by Lust and Envy (tied at 26 percent). Sloth, Gluttony and Pride were also-rans; Anger came in last.

The Moral Hit Parade

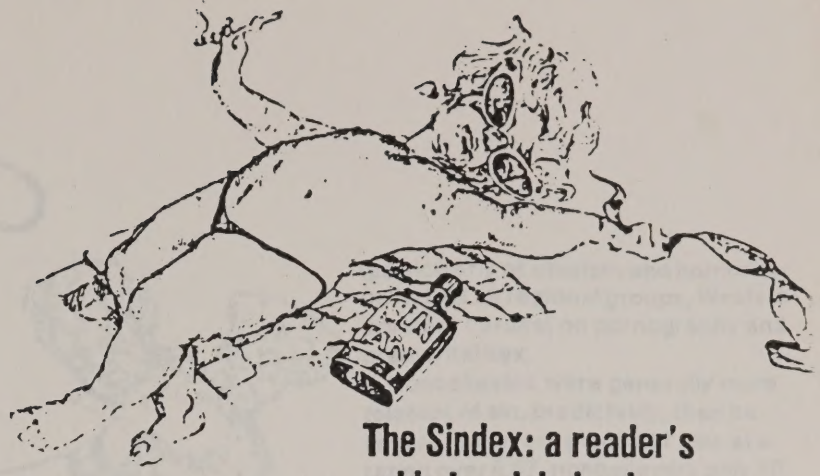
The beauty of a Sin Poll is that it provides concrete answers to timeless questions. To wit: Is it more sinful to feel lust in your heart than to lie on your federal income tax form? Would most people feel guiltier about calling in sick when they're not than going to an X-rated movie? Is failing to vote a greater sin than swearing? The answers, according to readers, are no, yes and only in the West and Northeast (a further breakdown of results pinpointed differences according to the respondent's sex, state of residence and religious beliefs).

In almost every subgroup, murder, rape, incest and child abuse were ranked 1-2-3-4 and scored significantly higher than the next evil contender, spying against one's country. After that, things get more interesting; the varied mix of nominated behaviors produced some fairly jarring juxtapositions. Cutting in front of someone in a line was deemed morally worse, for example, than mercy killing and unwed parenthood. Parking in a handicapped zone was even worse. Living together without benefit of marriage was considered as sinful as capital punishment. Perhaps surprisingly, some behaviors that might be considered to lack a moral component—overeating, for example, or smoking—raised more eyebrows than activities that obviously include an ethical dimension, such as telling a little white lie.

Go Figure It Dep't.

The regional, religious and gender breakdowns yielded several more and less comprehensible results:

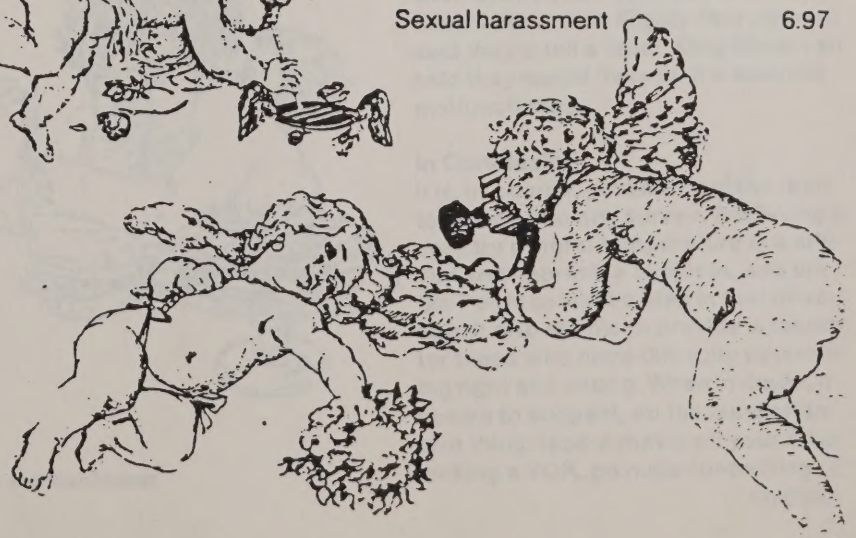
- Northeasterners as a group were most tolerant of sin, Southerners least

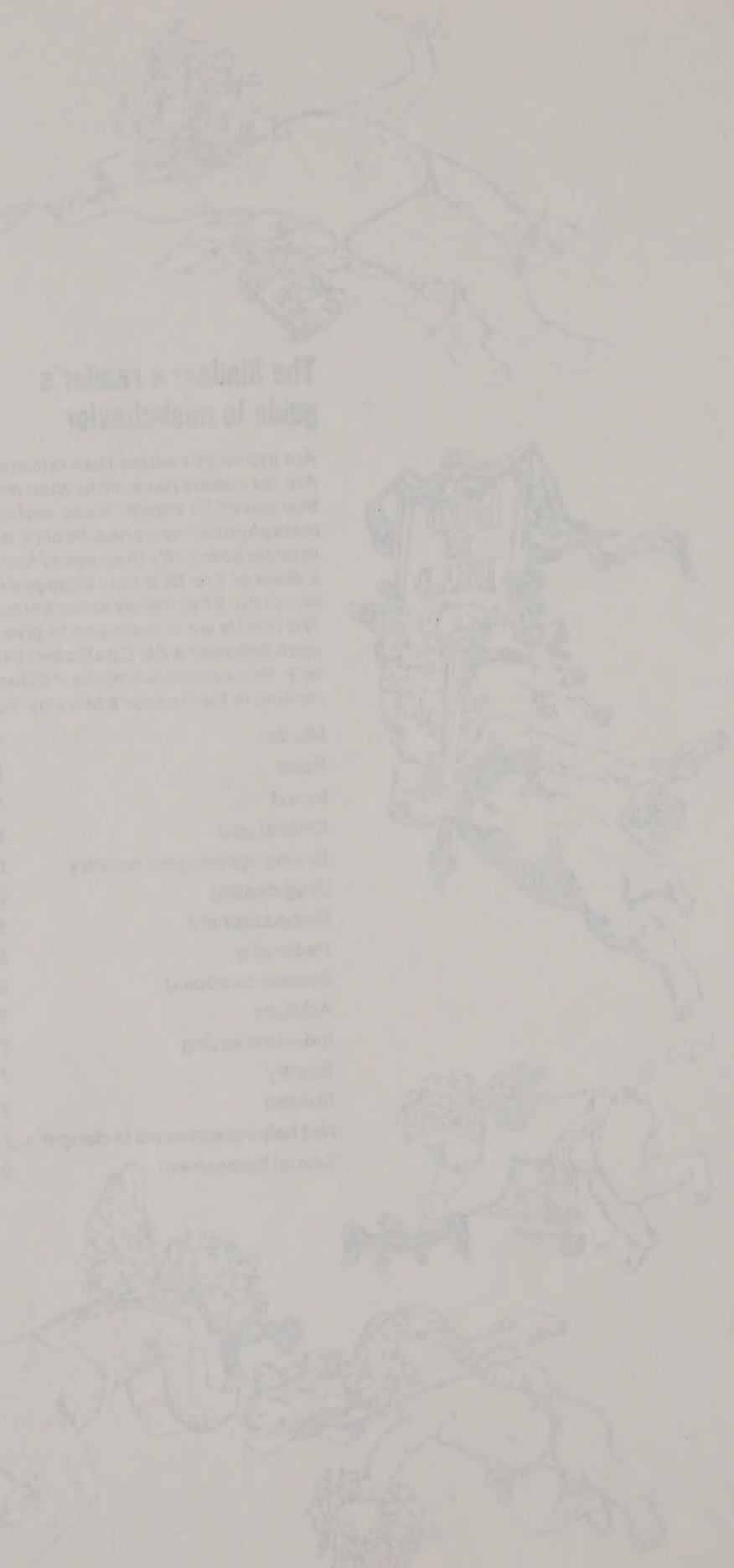


The Sindex: a reader's guide to misbehavior

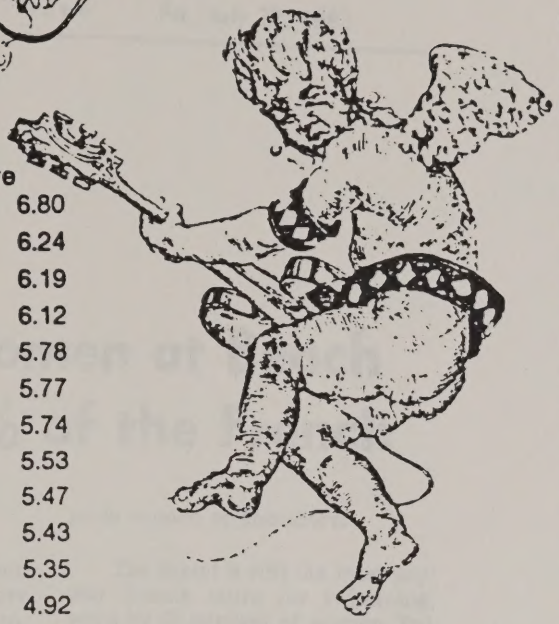
Are hypocrites worse than tattlers? Are tax cheats more sinful than industrial spies? To answer these and other metaphysical mysteries, PEOPLE *asked readers how guilty they would feel, on a scale of 1 to 10, if they engaged in any of the 51 activities listed below. The results were averaged to give each behavior a Sin Coefficient (Adultery, for example, earned a 7.63) and a ranking in the Reader's Morality Index.*

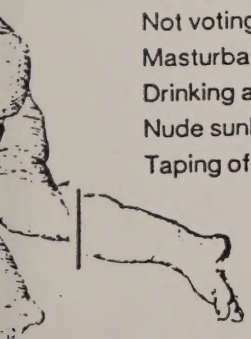
Murder	9.84
Rape	9.77
Incest	9.68
Child abuse	9.59
Spying against your country	8.98
Drug dealing	8.83
Embezzlement	8.49
Pederasty	8.30
Spouse swapping	8.09
Adultery	7.63
Industrial spying	7.53
Bigotry	7.42
Suicide	7.31
Not helping someone in danger	7.09
Sexual harassment	6.97





Misrepresenting something you're selling	6.80
Taking drugs	6.24
Hypocrisy	6.19
Atheism	6.12
Homosexuality	5.78
Abortion	5.77
Revenge	5.74
Parking in handicapped zone	5.53
Killing to protect your property	5.47
Greed	5.43
Cheating on your income tax	5.35
Selfishness	4.92
Cutting into lines	4.91
Mercy killing	4.79
Unwed parenthood	4.56
Calling in sick when you're not	4.47
Overeating	4.43
Reading/viewing pornography	4.31
Divorce	4.12
Explicit rock lyrics	4.10
Idle gossip	4.10
Jealousy	4.08
Laziness	4.08
Tattling	3.93
Living together without marriage	3.74
Capital punishment	3.74
Premarital sex	3.70
Lust in your heart	3.65
Smoking	3.38
Swearing	3.34
Telling a white lie	3.25
Not voting	3.07
Masturbation	2.93
Drinking alcohol	2.78
Nude sunbathing	2.76
Taping off TV or radio	1.76





Illustrations by Chris Duke and Stan Hunter

(particularly of atheism and homosexuality). Of all regional groups, Westerners were hardest on pornography and premarital sex.

- Nonbelievers were generally more tolerant of sin, predictably, than believers. Believers placed 17 sins at a rating over 6.67, nonbelievers only 10.
- Women were generally more judgmental than men and especially so on two controversial issues: pornography (worse to women) and executing criminals (worse among men).
- A hounded 12 percent of believers in God believe in hell but not heaven. Another, presumably happier 21 percent of believers said they believe in heaven but not hell.
- Overall, readers said they commit about 4.64 sins per month, although churchgoers felt they commit a lot more (6.80) than nonchurchgoers (2.76). Seventy percent of readers said they are more tolerant of sin than their parents were, but 40 percent also believe that they commit more sins than their parents did at the same age.
- Most readers said they were significantly more tolerant of homosexuality, abortion, mercy killing, revenge, pornography and premarital sex than they were 15 years ago.

The Soul & New Machines

In an intriguing question that wouldn't have made sense 15 years ago, readers were asked if they would report a bank error, in their favor, made by a) a cashier b) a cash machine and c) the bank's computer. Eighty-four percent said they'd tell a teller. Only 60 percen said they would 'fess up if a machine malfunctioned.

In Conclusion

It is, of course, probably a sin to read too much into any survey. But taking a country's moral temperature is a difficult and imprecise business, and the Sin Poll is at least a step in that direction. It also seems to provide a solutio for those who have difficulty determin ing right and wrong. When in doubt, it seems to suggest, do the least offensive thing: tape a movie off your TV or lacking a VCR, go nude sunbathing. □

CONTINUE

Topless Women at Beach Please 87% of the French

Paris

The French have learned to love nudity at the seashore — 33 percent of French women admit to bathing nude or topless, a survey reported yesterday.

In a mid-July poll by the weekly magazine VSD, 87 percent of those questioned said they were perfectly happy to see women topless at the beach.

Fifty-nine percent said they were not annoyed by seeing totally nude women on the shore.

The bikini is still the most popular female attire for swimming, worn by 38 percent of women. But more women said they go topless — 27 percent compared to 20 percent — than don the one-piece bathing suit. The one-piece wearers are generally over 60 years old. An additional 6 percent swim nude.

"In other words," commented VSD, "the French of 1983 are becoming as liberated as the Scandinavians."

United Press